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THE FIRST PRESIDENT'S INTEREST IN WASHINGTON AS TOLD BY HIMSELF.

By JOHN BALL OSBORNE, A.M.

(Read before the Society November 12, 1900.)

A detailed account of the share of George Washington in the location and founding of the capital of the United States would constitute an epitome of that epoch of our national history. It was his strong personality that dominated in the final choice of a site by Congress in 1790, and in the tedious and onerous task of transforming an unpromising wilderness into a habitable seat of government, he displayed his splendid executive abilities and tireless energy. When he had chosen the exact site, as empowered by Congress, and the lines of the Federal Territory had been run, and the land for the Federal City acquired from the proprietors, after considerable negotiating—all under his able supervision—he gave his attention to plans of the future city and of the government buildings, and his solicitous interest in the preparations for the suitable accommodation of Congress and the President, and executive officers, as well as the success of the whole enterprise, ceased only when life fled.

Active and prominent as was the part that he played in all this planning and building, his agency in the previous location of the seat of government on the banks of the Potomac, was no less important and effective, although silent and unobtrusive. In regard to this phase of the question, his letters are singularly silent; doubtless because he feared that any public expression of his personal preference would be misconstrued and interpreted as prompted

by the selfish consideration of his being an extensive land-owner on the Potomac. But whether restrained by modesty or influenced by policy, Washington displayed excellent judgment in holding aloof from the tedious and acrimonious discussions on the question of the location of the national capital which prevailed in and out of Congress during the period from 1783 to 1790. It became not only a partisan, but a sectional issue, and threats of disunion were more than once proclaimed in Congress. If we are not mistaken, it was the first issue that arrayed the North against the South, eclipsing in gravity slavery and the funding bill. Notwithstanding the little evidence in writing that Washington has left respecting this matter—in striking contrast to the formidable pile of his correspondence relating to the founding of the capital—we are disposed to credit him with the exercise of skillful diplomacy.

As early as September, 1774, when the "Great Continental Council" first assembled in Carpenter's Hall, Philadelphia, if Washington had been invited to select the permanent seat of the general government, he would, in all probability, have given the preference to the vicinity of Alexandria or Georgetown, simply on the ground of centrality, for it was then practically the center of population, as well as of territory, as regards the sea-coast line. Ever since his youthful surveying days he had been familiar with its topography and natural advantages. Moreover, the Potomac was a navigable stream whose commercial prospects, it was then thought, would be vastly improved by a system of canals affording western connections. Washington never lost sight of these considerations and in due season his well-known preference for the banks of the Potomac was a powerful agency in winning over a majority in Congress, but only after several narrow escapes from another choice.

It will be remembered that the Continental Congress and

its successor, the Congress of the Confederation, during the period from 1774 to 1789, held sessions in no less than eight different towns, as the exigencies of war or other circumstances dictated, namely, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Lancaster, York, Princeton, Annapolis, Trenton, and New York. During the Revolution, General Washington did not concern himself with this matter, beyond giving timely warning to the delegates of the approach of the British to Philadelphia. There is every reason for believing that the legislative halls and executive offices of this great government would to-day be crowded somewhere along the narrow thoroughfares of the City of Brotherly Love had it not been for the Providential impatience of about eighty unpaid patriots of the Pennsylvania line, who marched from their camp at Lancaster to Philadelphia, in arms and under command of non-commissioned officers, and on June 21, 1783, made a demonstration in front of Independence Hall and so frightened the assembled delegates that they adjourned in haste and reassembled at Princeton, New Jersey. It was claimed that the State and municipal authorities were either unable or unwilling to suppress the mutiny. At any rate, this rather insignificant incident left a lasting impression upon the minds of the delegates from all sections of the country and unquestionably contributed more than anything else to convincing Congress of the necessity of securing territory for the location of its permanent residence wherein it should have exclusive jurisdiction, entirely independent of any State government and influence. The first occasion when the vexing question of the location of the Federal territory seemed to be on the point of being settled was on December 23, 1784, when an ordinance was agreed to by Congress providing for the purchase of land and the erection of public buildings on the banks of the Delaware, near the Lower Falls. It is needless to add that nothing was ever accomplished under this resolution. In

May, 1787, when the Congress of the Confederation was sitting in New York, Mr. Lee, of Virginia, made a strenuous but vain effort to have Georgetown, Md., selected, presumably with Washington's approval. Next, the makers of the Constitution grappled with the subject, but contented themselves with defining the character of the future Federal district without selecting the site. This remained the status of the matter until after the adoption of the Constitution.

Washington's attitude at this period is well shown in the following letter dated August 18, 1788, addressed to James Madison, who had written him (July 21, 1788) that the Delegates who wished to make New York the place of meeting of the First Congress under the Constitution were studiously promoting delay. In his reply, Washington says :

"I am clearly in sentiment with you that the longer the question respecting the permanent Seat of Congress remains unagitated, the greater certainty there will be of its fixture in a central spot. But not having the same means of information and judging that you have, it would have been a moot point with me, whether a *temporary* residence of that body at New York would not have been a less likely means of keeping it *ultimately* from the center (being further removed from it) than if it was to be at Philadelphia; because, in proportion as you draw it to the center, you lessen the inconveniences and of course the solicitude of the Southern and Western extremities;—and when to these are superadded the acquaintances and connections which will naturally be formed—the expenses which more than probably will be incurred for the accommodation of the public Officers—with a long train of et ceteras, it might be found an arduous task to approach nearer to the Axis thereafter. These, however, are first thoughts, and may not go to the true principles of policy which govern in this case."

Again, in a letter to Madison, under date of September 23, 1788, he writes :

“Upon mature reflection, I think the reasons you offer in favor of Philadelphia, as the place for the first meeting of Congress, are conclusive; especially when the farther agitation of the question respecting its permanent residence is taken into consideration.”

Nevertheless, the partisans of New York were strong enough to make it the place of inauguration of the Government under the Constitution and so when the First Congress assembled there in the spring of 1789 one of the first questions demanding settlement was that of the permanent seat. Virginia and Maryland offered cessions of land and the sovereignty thereof, as contemplated by the provision in the Constitution, and also appropriations of money. New York and Philadelphia reminded Congress of the fine quarters they had provided gratuitously in the past, while Germantown, Baltimore, Wright's Ferry, Havre de Grace and several other places pressed their respective claims. After a long debate, on September 28, 1789, Germantown was actually agreed upon as the permanent capital by both houses and the bill failed only because of a trifling amendment, made just prior to adjournment at the close of the session. This was indeed a narrow escape; but, fortunately, it was the last, for Congress at its next session forever settled the location issue by a bill which passed the House of Representatives by the narrow margin of 32 to 29 and the Senate by a vote of 14 to 12, and was approved by Washington on July 16, 1790. According to Jefferson the passage of this bill was effected only by trading votes with those who favored the famous funding bill; but as the President had nothing to do with this legislative bargain it does not come within our purview.

The Act of July 16, 1790, established the temporary seat of government at Philadelphia from 1790 to 1800, and thereafter the permanent seat in a district not exceeding

the Constitutional ten miles square to be located under the direction of the President by three Commissioners of his choice, on the Potomac River, at some place between the mouths of the Eastern Branch and the Conococheague. The Commissioners were also empowered to "purchase or accept such quantity of land on the eastern side of said river within the said district as the President shall deem proper for the use of the United States; and according to such plans as the President shall approve"; also to provide "suitable buildings for the accommodation of Congress, and of the President, and for public offices of the Government of the United States," in time for their occupancy in the year 1800. These provisions show the extensive scope of Washington's powers and duties respecting the location and founding of the Federal capital.

The Conococheague is a creek that traverses Franklin County, Pa., and Washington County, Md., emptying into the Potomac at the village of Williamsburg, about 80 miles above the mouth of the Eastern Branch. You will thus observe that Washington had the power to locate the capital 80 miles north of its present site. An amendatory Act of Congress (approved March 3, 1791) empowered the President to include in the Federal district any part of the territory below the mouth of the Eastern Branch and above the mouth of Hunting Creek, Va. This was done, at Washington's suggestion, so as to embrace the town of Alexandria, Va.

Washington appointed (January 22, 1791) three intimate friends as the first commissioners, viz: General Thomas Johnson, Dr. David Stuart and Hon. Daniel Carroll. General Johnson, the first Governor of Maryland, had been his comrade-in-arms in the Revolution and companion in the exploring expedition up the Potomac. Stuart was a practicing physician in Alexandria, who had married the widow of Major John Parke Custis, step-son of Washington.

Daniel Carroll, brother of Bishop Carroll, had been a Representative in Congress and was an educated and able man of large influence in Maryland. In pursuance of the President's proclamation (March 30, 1791), these men directed Surveyor Andrew Ellicott to lay out the original district of ten miles square, that is, comprising 100 square miles—of which about 64 square miles were taken from Maryland and 36 from Virginia, the latter portion being retroceded to Virginia in 1846.

The site of the city was then covered by farms and small plantations of tobacco and corn, although two embryonic towns had been plotted and a few buildings erected, one settlement being on the Eastern Branch and known as Carrollsburg and the other situated east of Observatory Hill and called Funkstown, afterwards Hamburg. The following letter addressed by Washington (then at Philadelphia) to William Deakins, Jr., and Benjamin Stoddert, of Georgetown, under date of February 3, 1791, marks the initial action taken by Washington toward securing the soil from the original proprietors.

“The federal territory being located, the competition for the location of the town now rests between the mouth of the Eastern Branch and the lands on the river below and adjacent to Georgetown. In favor of the former, nature has furnished powerful advantages. In favor of the latter, is its vicinity to Georgetown—which puts it in the way of deriving aids from it in the beginning, and of communicating in return an increased value to the property of that town. These advantages have been so poised in my mind as to give it different tendencies at different times.”

Washington then designates certain parcels of land which stand in the way of the location near Georgetown and which he requests his correspondents to try and purchase quietly and without exciting suspicion that it is in behalf of the government.

The negotiations on the part of the Government with

the proprietors of the site of the city were mostly conducted by Washington himself. He arrived at Georgetown in the early morning of March 28, 1791; his work that day is thus described in his diary :

“I examined the Surveys of Mr. Ellicot who had been sent on to lay out the district of ten miles square for the federal seat; and also the works of Majr. L’Enfant who had been engaged to examine & make a draught of the grds. in the vicinity of George Town and Carrollsburg on the Eastern branch.”

The following day Washington spent in riding over and carefully inspecting the lands to be acquired by the United States for the federal city. He was accompanied by the three Commissioners and Major L’Enfant and Andrew Ellicott. The result of this tour of inspection is shown in the following note in his diary for March 29th :

“Finding the interests of the Landholders about Georgetown and those about Carrollsburgh much at variance and that their fears and jealousies of each were counteracting the public purposes & might prove injurious to its best interests whilst if properly managed they might be made to subserve it—I requested them to meet me at six o’clock this afternoon at my lodgings, which they accordingly did.”

At the meeting here referred to (which was at Suter’s Tavern, Georgetown), Washington patiently discussed every phase of the subject in hand with the assembled property owners and after several hours they all agreed to surrender their lands on the conditions suggested by the President, which were honorable to all concerned. On the following day, March 30th, the formal Agreement was signed in the presence of Washington by 19 of the principal proprietors of the soil. Washington records the event in his diary as follows :

“The parties to whom I addressed myself yesterday evening, having taken the matter into consideration saw

the propriety of my observations; and that whilst they were contending for the shadow they might loose the substance; and therefore mutually agreed and entered into articles to surrender for public purposes, one half of the land they severally possessed within bounds which were designated as necessary for the City to stand.

“This business being thus happily finished & some directions given to the Commissioners, the Surveyor and Engineer with respect to the mode of laying out the district—Surveying the grounds for the City & forming them into lots—I left Georgetown.”

In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State, under date of March 31, 1791, Washington reports his success in reconciling the contending interests of Georgetown and Carrollsburg and transmits his proclamation, dated Georgetown, March 30th, defining the lines of the territory selected for the permanent seat of government. After describing the terms of the Agreement entered into by the landholders, he adds :

“To these considerations all the principal landholders, except the purchaser of Slater's property, who was not present, have subscribed; and it is not doubted, that the few, who were not present, will readily come into the measure, even the obstinate Mr. Burns.”

Upon this characterization of David Burns, who was a rather ignorant but extensive landowner, tradition has reared many apocryphal stories which have been given entirely too much currency by local historians. For example, the writer does not believe that the dignified Washington repaired to Burns's shanty, which, within the memory of all of us, stood adjoining the Van Ness mansion, and labored long and earnestly with the stubborn farmer until the latter lost his temper and flagrantly insulted the President of the United States. On the contrary, we believe that certain other proprietors caused Washington more trouble than did Burns, for scarcely had he

turned his back and begun a tour in the South before a few of the signers of the Agreement manifested their discontent with the terms they had accepted and sought to dictate what use should be made of the public squares. The annoyance caused Washington by this incident will be understood from the following extracts from his letter to the Commissioners, dated Charleston, May 7, 1791 :

“ It is an unfortunate circumstance, in the present stage of the business, relative to the federal city, that difficulties unforeseen and unexpected should arise to darken, perhaps to destroy the fair prospect, which it presented when I left Georgetown—and which the instrument, then signed by the combined interest (as it was termed) of Georgetown and Carrollsburg, so plainly describes—the pain which this occurrence occasions me is the more sensibly felt, as I had taken pleasure, during my journey through the several States, to relate the agreement and to speak of it, on every proper occasion, in terms, which applauded the conduct of the Parties, as being alike conducive to the public welfare, and to the interest of individuals, which last, it was generally thought would be most benefitted by the amazing encrease of the property reserved to the Landholders.”

He closes with these significant words :

“ Upon the whole, I shall hope and expect that the business will be suffered to proceed ; and the more so, as they cannot be ignorant that the farther consideration of a certain measure in a neighboring state, stands postponed—for what reason is left to their own information or conjectures. I expect to be with you at the time appointed, and should be exceedingly pleased to find all difficulties removed.”

This wish was gratified, for all the proprietors, including the much-abused Burns, fell into line and conveyed their property to trustees designated by Washington. The preceding events are pithily summed up by Washington in a paragraph contained in his letter to Col. David Humphreys, Minister to Spain, under date of July 20, 1791 :

“ You have been informed of the spot fixed on for the

seat of government on the Potomac ; and I am now happy to add, that all matters between the proprietors of the soil and the public are settled to the mutual satisfaction of the parties, and that the business of laying out the city, the grounds for public buildings, walks, etc., is progressing under the inspection of Major L'Enfant with pleasing prospects."

A more formal but equally concise summary is given in the following paragraph from Washington's Speech to both Houses of Congress on October 25, 1791 :

" Pursuant to the authority contained in the several acts on that subject, a district of ten miles square, for the permanent seat of the government of the United States, has been fixed, and announced by proclamation ; which district will comprehend lands on both sides of the river Potomac, and the towns of Alexandria and Georgetown. A city has also been laid out agreeably to a plan which will be placed before Congress ; and, as there is a prospect, favored by the rate of sales which have already taken place, of ample funds for carrying on the necessary public buildings, there is every expectation of their due progress."

The first public sale of lots was held at Georgetown on October 17, 1791, by the Commissioners. Under date of the 20th of November Washington wrote to David Stuart (one of the Commissioners) saying that he had heard with a degree of surprise and concern not easy to be expressed, that Major L'Enfant had refused the map of the Federal City when it was requested by the Commissioners for the satisfaction of the purchasers at the sale. He states that he had not expected to meet with such perverseness in Major L'Enfant as his late conduct exhibited, and that he had given him to understand through a direct, though unofficial, channel, that he must in future look to the Commissioners for directions. In concluding, Washington adds :

" The rumor, which was spread at the sale, that Congress never would reside there, is one of the expedients, that will be exerted in all its force, with a view to discour-

age the sales of the lots, and the buildings thereon, that the accommodations may be unfit for the government when the period shall arrive that the removal is to take place.

“When I see Major L’Enfant, who it is said will shortly be here [Philadelphia], I shall endeavor to bring him to some explanation of the terms on which he will serve the public; and will also impress upon him the necessity of despatch, that as early a sale as circumstances will admit may ensue.”

Again, under date of December 18th, Washington wrote to the Commissioners on the subject of the dispute which had arisen between L’Enfant and Mr. Carroll, of Duddington. It seems that the latter, impatient because of L’Enfant’s delay in laying out the streets, erected a house which proved to stand in one of the grand avenues designed by the engineer, who, on discovering the fact, demolished it without ceremony. The sequel of this unfortunate affair is found in the following extract from a letter addressed by Jefferson to the Commissioners, under date of March 6, 1792:

“It having been found impracticable to employ Major L’Enfant about the Federal City, in that degree of subordination which was lawful and proper he has been notified that his services are at an end.”

In a letter dated Philadelphia, March 8, 1792, Washington wrote to David Stuart, suggesting that since the plan of the city had met universal applause, so far as his information went, and its author, Major L’Enfant had become a very discontented man, it would be proper to offer him for his past services say 500 guineas and a lot in a good part of the city. In the same letter he states his views respecting the public buildings as follows:

“The doubts and opinion of others with respect to the permanent seat have occasioned no change in my sentiments on the subject. They have always been that the plan ought to be prosecuted with all the despatch the

nature of the case will admit, and that the public buildings in size, form and elegance, should look beyond the present day. I would not have it understood from hence that I lean to extravagance—A chaste plan sufficiently capacious and convenient for a period not too remote, but one to which we may reasonably look forward, would meet my idea in the Capitol. For the President's House I would design a building which should also look forward but execute no more of it at present than might suit the circumstances of this country, when it shall be first wanted. A plan comprehending more may be executed at a future period when the wealth, population, and importance of it shall stand upon much higher ground than they do at present."

In a letter to the Commissioners under date of November 17, 1792, he acknowledges the receipt of a list of the sale of lots in the Federal City and expresses himself as more gratified with the prices than the numbers disposed of, but is pleased to find that several mechanics are among the purchasers of lots, as they would in all probability be among the first improvers of them and would be valuable citizens. This illustrates, as well as anything we know of in his writings, Washington's innate respect for the laboring man. Concerning a proposed propaganda for the booming of lots in the new capital, he makes the following remarks :

"How far the idea which Mr. Blodget suggests of having an Agent to pass through the several States to dispose of Lots might be beneficial or not, I am unable to say ; but it appears to me that if a respectable and responsible character in the principal town of each State, could be authorized to dispose of the public Lots, as purchasers might appear ; provided the matter could be so arranged that no confusion or inconvenience should arise from the same Lot being disposed of by two or more Agents, * * it would be a means of accommodating persons in different parts of the Union, and would expedite the sales of the Lots. But this, as well as Mr. Blodget's suggestion (which rather

appears to me to be hawking the Lots about) must be weighed and determined upon according to your best judgment and information."

The labor question was one of the vexing problems that confronted the President and his commissioners. They could obtain plenty of unskilled laborers in the neighboring cities, but there was a dearth of competent artisans. In one of his early letters to the Commissioners Washington had urged the importation of German and Scotch artisans; the attempt was made, but it proved a failure, as the following private letter from the President to the Commissioners, dated December 18, 1792, indicates:

"Your letter to the Secretary of State dated if I recollect rightly the 5th instant intimating among other things that you had failed in an attempt which had been made to import workmen from Scotland, equally with that for obtaining them from Holland, fills me with *real* concern; for I am very apprehensive if your next campaign in the Federal City is not marked with vigor, it will cast such a cloud over this business and will so arm the enemies of the measure, as to enable them to give it (if not its death blow) a wound from which it will not easily recover.

"The more I consider the subject, the more I am convinced of the expediency of importing a number of workmen from Europe to be employed in the Federal City. The measure has not only economy to recommend it, but is important by placing the quantity of labor which may be performed by such persons upon a certainty for the term for which they shall be engaged. * * *

"Upon the whole it will readily be perceived in what a serious light I consider delay in the progress of the public buildings, and how anxious I am to have them pushed forward. In a word, the next is the year that will give the tone to the City,—if marked with energy, individuals will be inspirited,—the sales will be enhanced—confidence diffused and emulation created. Without it I should not be surprized to find the Lots unsaleable, and everything at a stand."

Let us now turn to the planning of the capitol building.

In a private communication to the Commissioners, dated January 31, 1793, Washington says :

“ I have had under consideration Mr. Hallet's plans for the Capitol, which undoubtedly have a great deal of merit. Doctor Thornton has also given me a view of his. These last come forward under some very advantageous circumstances. The grandeur, simplicity, and beauty of the exterior; the propriety with which the apartments are distributed, and the oeconomy in the whole mass of the structure, will I doubt not give it a preference in your eyes, as it has done in mine, and those of several others whom I have consulted, and who are deemed men of skill in architecture. I have therefore thought it better to give the Doctor time to finish his plan and for this purpose to delay till your next meeting a final decision.”

The outcome of this was that Dr. Thornton's plans, drawn in water-colors and captivating to the eye, were accepted, notwithstanding that he had received no professional training such as Hallet possessed. The latter, however, was retained as supervising architect.

As their labors increased the Commissioners not unnaturally became tired of giving their services gratuitously, as they had done in their early enthusiasm. Dr. Stuart dropped a line to Washington on the subject and suggested \$6 per day and an allowance for travelling expenses as a proper compensation. He received the following response dated Philadelphia, March 3, 1793 :

“ With respect to your ideas of a future allowance, I am bold in assuring you, that no fixed salary in the United States (however they have been reprobated for their extravagance) from the Chief Magistrate to the Doorkeeper of the House of Representatives, is equal to one thousand dollars clear of expenses.”

It would seem from the tenor of this that Washington regarded Dr. Stuart's ideas of a fit compensation as unduly exalted.

Washington's letters from 1793 to 1795 contain fre-

quent references to speculative enterprises in the Federal City on the part of Messrs. Greenleaf, Blodget and others. These speculations all ended disastrously and seriously impeded the healthy growth of the city. An echo of the famous lottery (or series of lotteries) established under quasi-official auspices by Mr. Blodget, owner of the Great Hotel, is heard in the following extract from a letter dated September 25, 1793, from Washington to his Secretary, Colonel Tobias Lear. Referring to Lear's little son he writes :

“As a testimony of my affection for him I send him a ticket in the lottery which is now drawing in the Federal City ; and if should be his fortune to draw the hotel it will add to the pleasure I have in giving it.”

The sequel of this incident contains something of the pathetic. After the lapse of seven months, during which the boy probably remained in pleasurable anticipation, Washington again writes to Lear, under date of May 6, 1794, as follows :

“Often through the medium of Mr. Langdon we hear of your son Lincoln and with pleasure that he continues to be the healthy and sprightly child he always was. He declared if his ticket should turn up a prize he would go and live in the Federal City. He did not consider, poor little fellow, that some of the prizes would hardly build him a baby house, nor foresee that one of these was to fall to his lot, having drawn ten dolls. only. Mr. Bl——t's agency in this lottery will it is feared, be more productive of thorns than roses ; the matter is not yet wound up and the Commissioners appear to be uneasy. In all other respects matters as far as the accounts of them have come to my knowledge, are going on well.”

In a letter to Daniel Carroll (January 7, 1795) Washington refers to the unfortunate speculations in lots in the Federal City by Mr. Greenleaf (who was associated in some of these enterprises with Robert Morris, the celebrated financier of the Revolution) and expresses his oppo-

sition to any more large sales of lots, if there should be any other resource for raising money with which to carry on operations.

“The sum,” he writes, “which will be necessary to complete the public buildings, and other improvements in the City, is very considerable. You have already, if I mistake not, disposed of more than a moiety of the Lots which appertain to the Public; and I fear not a fourth part of the Money necessary for that purpose, is yet provided. The persons to whom you have sold are reselling to others (subjecting them to the conditions to which they are made liable themselves) and this they are doing to an immense profit. Lately, a Gentleman from England, has paid, or is to pay £50,000 for 500 Lots. Will it not be asked, why are speculators to pocket so much money? Are not the Commissioners as competent to make bargains?”

“For a variety of reasons, unnecessary to be enumerated, tho’ some of them are very important, I could wish to see the force of your means directed toward the capitol in preference to the other public buildings.”

Of the original Board of Commissioners of the District, the terms of Johnson and Stuart expired in 1794, and that of Carroll in 1795. Their successors were Gustavus Scott and Alexander White of Maryland and William Thornton of Pennsylvania.

In a private communication (May 17, 1795) to Mr. Alexander White, the President urges despatch in the building operations, saying:

“The year 1800 will be soon upon us [How little idea he had that it would never come for him!]; the necessity therefore of hurrying on the public buildings, and other works of a public nature, and executing of them with economy; the propriety of preventing idleness in those who have day or monthly wages, and imposition by others, who work by measure—by the piece, or by contract—and seeing that all contracts are fulfilled with good faith, are too obvious to be dwelt on,—and are not less important than to form plans, and establish rules, for conducting, and

bringing to a speedy and happy conclusion this great and arduous business."

The following lines addressed by Washington (July 4, 1796) to Mr. Scott, another member of the new board, are pertinent :

"I should view the residence of the Commissioners of the City and their officers of different grades, in some central part of it as a nest egg (pardon the expression) which will attract others, and prove the *surest* means of accomplishing the great object which all have in view—the removal of Congress at the appointed time—without which every thing will become stagnant, and your sanguine hopes blasted."

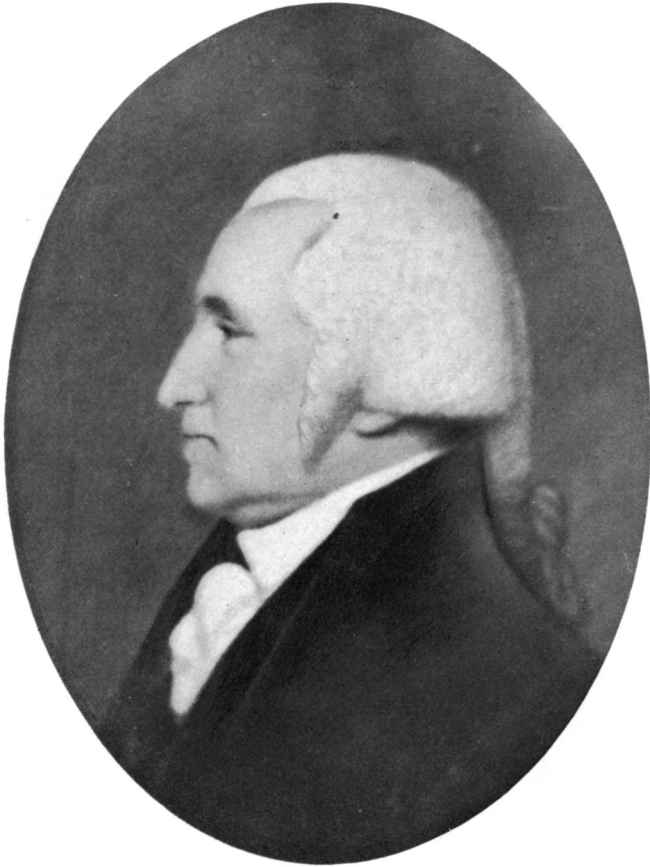
In a letter to the Commissioners, under date of September 17, 1796, Washington says :—

"It would be very agreeable and pleasing to me if a site should be given to the Spanish Minister upon which he could erect a residence for the representative of that country to the United States. It would contribute much more to the advancement of the city than any pecuniary consideration to be derived from sale of lots."

The following letter to the Commissioners (February 15, 1797) advises concentration of energies on the Capitol building. It is the last important communication from Washington in the capacity of President of the United States on matters relating exclusively to the District of Columbia.

"I am now decidedly of opinion that the edifices for the Executive offices ought to be suspended ;—that the work on the house for the President should advance no faster (at the expense or retardment of the Capitol) than is necessary to keep pace therewith ;—and to preserve it from injury ;—and, that all the means (not essential for other purposes) and all the force, ought to be employed on the Capitol.

"It may be relied on, that it is the progress of that building, that is to inspire, or depress public confidence.



GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE AGE OF 64.

Portrait in pastel, never before published, made by James Sharpless, at Philadelphia in 1796, for President Washington, and presented by him to his friend, Judge James Duane, of New York. Since 1797 it has hung in the Duane mansion in Duanesburgh, Schenectady county, N. Y. This reproduction is from a photograph recently taken by Dr. Thomas Featherstonhaugh, of Washington, D. C., a great-grandson of the original owner, Judge Duane.

“It would gratify the public wishes and expectation ;—might possibly appease clamor ;—and, if all the buildings cannot be completed in time no material evil would result from the postponement of the subordinate offices, until the Capitol is in such a state of forwardness as to remove all doubts of its being ready for the reception of Congress by the time appointed.”

In his retirement Washington kept up his friendly correspondence with David Humphreys and in a letter under date of June 26, 1797, gave him the following news respecting the Federal City.

“The public buildings in the Federal City go on well ;—one wing of the Capitol (with which Congress might make a very good shift), and the President's House will be covered in this Autumn, or to speak more correctly perhaps the latter is now receiving its cover, and the former will be ready for it by that epoch. An elegant bridge is thrown over the Potomack at the little falls, and the navigation of the river above will be completed nearly, this season, through which an immensity of Produce, must flow to the shipping Ports thereon.

“As my circle is *now small* my information will be of course contracted, as Alexandria and the Federal City will probably be the extent of my perambulations.”

In the course of a letter, under date of May 16, 1798, to Mrs. Sarah Fairfax (who had removed to Bath, England, where her husband, George W. Fairfax, of “Belvoir,” died), Washington says :

“A century hence, if this country keeps united (and it is surely its policy and interest to do it), will produce a city, though not as large as London, yet of a magnitude inferior to few others in Europe, on the banks of the Potomac, where one is now establishing for the permanent seat of the government of the United States, between Alexandria and Georgetown, on the Maryland side of the river, a situation not excelled for commanding prospect, good water, salubrious air, and safe harbour, by any in the world ; and where elegant buildings are erecting and in forwardness for the reception of Congress in the year 1800.”

Almost, if not actually, the last letter which Washington wrote relating in any way to the new capital was one addressed under date of June 17, 1798, to John Adams, his successor in office, wherein he says :

“I have heard with much pleasure, that you contemplate a visit to the city designated for the permanent seat of government of the United States, in the course of the summer or early autumn.

“It is unnecessary, I hope, for me in that event to express the satisfaction it would give Mrs. Washington and me to see Mrs. Adams, yourself, and company in the shade of our vine and fig-tree; but I shall request, that, while you remain in these parts, you will make Mount Vernon your head-quarters.”

President Adams, unfortunately, delayed his proposed tour of inspection to the District of Columbia until June, 1800, and visited Mount Vernon before returning to his home in Massachusetts, but the great Washington was then no more.

The following brief reference to Washington's visits to the Federal City, subsequent to the date of the letter last quoted, are gleaned from his diary for 1798 and 1799 :

1798. “September 20.—Went up to the Federal City—Dined & lodged at Mr. Thos. Peters.” [Thomas Peter, husband of Martha Parke Custis.]

“September 21.—Examined in company with the Comrs. some of the Lots in the Vicinity of the Capitol & fixed upon No. 16 in 634 to build on. Dined & lodged at Mr. Laws.” [Thomas Law, husband of Elizabeth Parke Custis.]

“October 9th, 10 and eleventh absent—in the Federal City.”

“December 18.—Breakfasted at Spurrier's—dined at Rhodes's and lodged at Mr. Laws in the Federal City.”

“December 19.—Stopped at Doctr. Thornton's and Mr. Peter's & dined at home.”

1799. “May 31.—Went up to the Fedl. City—dined & lodged with Mr. Peter.”

"June 1.—Dined & lodged at Mr. Laws."

"August 5.—Went up to George Town, to a general meeting of the Potomac Company—dined at the Union Tavern & lodged at Mr. Laws'."

"November 9.—Set out a little after 8 o'clock—viewed my building in the Fedl. City—Dined at Mr. Laws—& lodged at Mr. Thos. Peter's."

"November 10.—Returned home about noon."

There is every reason for believing that the last mentioned date, November 10, 1799, was the last occasion when Washington visited the National Capital. There is, however, a persistent tradition that Washington accompanied by his wife visited the President's House and inspected its apartments only a few days before his death. But neither his diary nor other writings refer to any visit to the Federal City later than November 10, 1799.

During the decade preceding the occupation by the government of its permanent seat, three ceremonious events took place in the District, in only one of which Washington participated, notwithstanding published modern accounts to the contrary. They were (1) the laying of the south corner-stone of the original District of Columbia, which was performed at Jones' Point, near Alexandria, on April 15, 1791. Washington's diary proves that on that day he was travelling near Petersburg, Va. (2) The laying of the corner-stone of the President's House with Masonic ceremonies, on October 13, 1792. It is frequently claimed that Washington officiated here; but *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* of October 15, 1792, contained the following item:

"The President of the United States, his Lady, and Family, arrived here [Philadelphia] on Saturday afternoon [October 13], from Mount Vernon."

As is well known, the journey at that time from the Federal City to Philadelphia occupied from three to four days.

(3) The laying of the southeast corner-stone of the old

Capitol with elaborate Masonic and military ceremonies, on September 18, 1793. On this occasion Washington participated and with his own hands laid the stone, in the capacity of an active Mason rather than as President of the United States. It was an impressive and memorable spectacle.

Washington manifested his confidence in the solid future of the Capital City by making substantial business investments therein. At one of the sales by the Commissioner's of the District, he purchased two lots (strictly, one—No. 16 in Square 634) on the west side of North Capitol Street, between B and C Streets, and paid \$963 for the property,* being, as he says, favored in the price on condition that he should build two brick houses thereon, each three stories high. At least one of these was completed before his death, and in the Schedule annexed to his will the lots and improvements (existing and prospective) are appraised at \$15,000. He had also acquired title to an entire square near Georgetown—No. 21, bounded by D and E Sts. and 25th and 26th Sts. N. W. for which he paid \$2,133.32; also four lots on the Eastern Branch (Square 667 and adjoining square) valued in the testamentary schedule at \$4,132. His holdings in the city of Washington therefore amounted to over \$21,000 in value.

There is one phase of the First President's vast and arduous labors in behalf of Washington City, which, although it has been thoroughly discussed again and again, should not be ignored in this paper. I refer to Washington's design of a National University to be established in

* Notwithstanding this statement by Washington in the Schedule annexed to his will, the original records of sales by the Commissioners, preserved in the office of Public Buildings and Grounds, War Dept., show that Lot 16 of Square 634 was sold to General Washington on Sept. 25, 1798, for \$535.70, being at the rate of ten cents per square foot, and that the third and last installment of this purchase money was not paid until January 14, 1801, after Washington's death. The writer is unable to explain the discrepancy.

the Federal City by the United States Government. No one can realize how dear this educational project was to the heart of the Father of his Country until he has read all his utterances on the subject. As early as 1775, while at headquarters in Cambridge, Washington, in conversation with his officers, predicted the establishment by the General Government of such an institution. Throughout his two Presidential terms he lost no proper opportunity of bringing the matter to the attention of the people and their representatives. In his Annual Addresses to Congress of January 8, 1790, and December 7, 1796, respectively, in his letters to Edmund Randolph (December 15, 1794), Jefferson (March 15, 1795), Alexander Hamilton (Sept. 1 and 6, 1796), Governor Brooke, of Virginia (March 16, 1795) and in formal communications to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, he repeatedly advocated the establishment of an institution of higher education by the National Government in the Federal City.

Looking over these several letters, perhaps the best expression of his views as to the need and advantages of a National University is found in the opening paragraphs of his letter to Governor Brooke :

“ It is with indescribable regret that I have seen the youth of the United States migrating to foreign countries in order to acquire the higher branches of erudition and to obtain a knowledge of the sciences. Although it would be injustice to many to pronounce the certainty of their imbibing maxims not congenial to republicanism, it must nevertheless be admitted that a serious danger is encountered by sending abroad among other political systems those who have not well learned the value of their own.

“ The time is therefore come when a plan of universal education ought to be adopted in the United States. Not only do the exigencies of public and private life demand it, but if it should ever be apprehended that prejudice would be entertained in one part of the Union against the other, an efficacious remedy will be to assemble the youth

of every part under such circumstances as will, by freedom of intercourse and collision of sentiment, give to their minds the direction of truth, philanthropy, and mutual conciliation."

These last words have been quoted as exhibiting Washington's prescience of the mighty conflict which afterwards shook the Union to its foundations, and some have even gone so far as to claim that the early establishment of the National University would have averted that terrible struggle.

Washington's reasons for giving the Federal City a preference over all other places for the university are made clear in his letter to Jefferson (March 15, 1795), viz :

"First, on account of its being the permanent seat of the Government of this Union, and where the laws and policy of it must be better understood than in any local part thereof. Secondly, because of its centrality. Thirdly, because one-half (or near it) of the District of Columbia is within the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the whole of the State not inconvenient thereto.* Fourthly, because, as a part of the endowment, it would be useful, but alone would be inadequate to that end. Fifthly, because many advantages, I conceive, would result from the jurisdiction which the General Government will have over it, which no other spot would possess. And, lastly, as the seminary is contemplated for the completion of education and study of the sciences, not for boys in their rudiments, it will afford the students an opportunity of attending the debates in Congress, and thereby becoming more liberally and better acquainted with the principles of law and government."

His intention of endowing the institution was formally expressed in a letter to the Commissioners of the District, under date of January 28, 1795, in which he said, in part :

* Washington gives the adjacency to Virginia as a reason because of the circumstances attending the gift to himself by the Legislature of Virginia of the Potomac stock which he intended to donate as a first endowment of the proposed university.

“The Federal City, from its centrality and the advantages which in other respects it must have over any other place in the United States, ought to be preferred as a proper site for such a university. And if a plan can be adopted upon a scale as extensive as I have described, and the execution of it should commence under favorable auspices in a reasonable time with a fair prospect of success, I will grant in perpetuity fifty shares in the navigation of the Potomac River toward the endowment of it.”

In a subsequent letter to the Commissioners (October 21, 1796) he designates, in virtue of power given him by the original landowners in their respective deeds of cession, a tract of 19 acres of land for the site of the university. This appropriation, long known as University Square, includes the site of the old Naval Observatory.

Washington considered this project of a National University of such paramount importance that he raised a final appeal for it in his last will and testament and also made therein practical provision for it. After reciting his oft-repeated convictions in the matter of its establishment under government auspices, the testator declares :

“I give and bequeath in perpetuity the fifty shares [value \$500 each] which I hold in the Potomac Company (under the aforesaid acts of the Legislature of Virginia) towards the endowment of a University, to be established within the limits of the District of Columbia, under the auspices of the general government, if that government should incline to extend a fostering hand toward it.”

The Potomac stock in question paid only one dividend after Washington's death, and before long the affairs of the Potomac Company were merged into the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Company; but what became of Washington's stock, the writer has no idea. He only knows that the establishment of the National University remains a national debt of honor, unpaid despite the persistent and intelligent agitation carried on by hundreds of patriotic men during an entire century.

It will be observed that in all the writings of Washington which we have quoted, he invariably speaks of the capital city as "the Federal City," notwithstanding that as early as September 9, 1791, it was formally named the "City of Washington" by the Commissioners of the District. The honor thus conferred upon the virtual Founder was endorsed and applauded by the entire nation, and the new name came into universal use. Nevertheless, Washington, to the end of his life—in his State papers, his formal and confidential letters, even in the intimacy of his personal diary which tells us so much—knew only "the Federal City," except on rare occasions, as in his will, where legal requirements made it necessary as a careful business man to use the proper designation of the city, and thus he unconsciously built an enduring monument to his innate modesty.